



Master in International Business Management and Languages
(MIBAL)

“How to boost influencer marketing ROI in Iran market”

“Cómo superar el retorno de la inversión en la industria de marketing influyente en el mercado de Irán”

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1.1. Resumen

Hoy en día, las empresas son conscientes de la importancia de las redes sociales digitales y su uso como un canal de comunicación eficaz para campañas de marketing. Sin embargo, las empresas están gastando gran cantidad de sus presupuestos en campañas de marketing de influencia (o influencers) sin tener una idea clara de este proceso sólo por seguir las tendencias del mercado. La creación de cada vez más plataformas y agencias de publicidad basadas en el marketing de influencia, confirman la rentabilidad de esta industria en la actualidad. El presente proyecto, une investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa con el objetivo de identificar el alcance, barreras y potencial del marketing de influencia en el Mercado Iraní. Esta información servirá para desarrollar una guía de acción para pequeñas y nuevas empresas que les servirá no solo para tener una visión más completa del Mercado del marketing de influencers, sino también para poder ejecutar sus campañas directamente, sin gastar dinero en agencias de publicidad.

1.2. Abstract

Nowadays, companies are aware of the importance of digital social media and the usage of it as an effective communication channel for marketing campaigns. businesses spend a huge amount of their budgets for influencer marketing campaigns¹ without having a clear image of this process just to follow market trends. Increase the number of platforms and advertising agencies based on influencer marketing, confirms the profitability of this industry these days. In this research, based on statistics and condition of Iran market and according to interviews with professionals, we tried to draw a guideline for small businesses and startups, not only having a bright insight in influencer marketing process but also being able to run their campaign, without spending money in advertising agencies.

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.grouphigh.com/blog/organizing-influencer-marketing-budget-2017/>

2. Introduction

By a quick look on the internet these days, we would face so many articles with attractive titles about “How to make money on Instagram²”- “step by step guide to Making Money from Instagram³” . Besides there are so many news and investigations about famous influencers and their high salaries, how they became famous in a short period of time and reach huge numbers of followers, and how much they might earn for sharing an advertising post.

Companies are using this opportunity in order to promote their product or services. They found this communication channel with the highest rate of ROI in comparison with other types of advertising. And according to studies, investing in social media marketing has raised, which means they’re willing to spend more money on influencer marketing campaigns. (Khamis & Welling, 2017)

On the other hand, advertising agencies noticed the market gap and they’re trying to increase their market share in this booming market. They provide information about influencers, study and categorize them and build a network of famous ones. These advertising agencies can be considered as a mediator between influencers and brands. In addition, the emergence of online platforms and applications with worldwide databases of influencers has made this market even more expanded. This procedure can simply be considered as a linear progress as figure 1 :

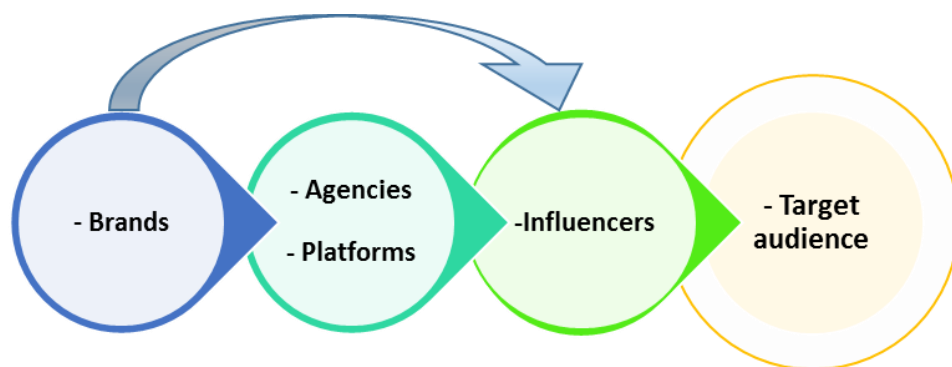


Figure 1 chain of brands accessing target audience through influencers and marketing agencies

² <https://www.shopify.com/blog/make-money-on-instagram>

³ <https://neilpatel.com/blog/make-money-on-instagram/>

According to our interviews, it seems small companies, especially, newborn startups, have a very limited budget for marketing so they need to be very careful about their marketing decisions. Limited resources do not allow any try and error. Having a clear image of Influencer marketing campaign procedure helps companies to make correct decisions about the main objectives of campaign and evaluations of it by defining the correct KPIs.

The aim of this research is to draw a guideline for all local and international small businesses or startups who wish to run an influencer marketing campaign in Iran market in order to reduce their costs of using mediatory agencies and to avoid wrong decisions. In this regard, I studied Instagram influencers in Iran market and based on the result of sample analysis, I tried to make some suggestions to find best fit influencer and related content for an influencer marketing campaign for all brands who need a clear image of this industry in Iran.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Digital Social Media in Iran

The population of Iran is estimated at around 82 million people in 2018⁴. The latest statistics show mobile internet users in Iran have reached 53 million in March 2018 according to Iran's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology. Previous statistics in June 2017 was around 47 million users, based on investments made in this sector by the major mobile operators in the country. Also, over 11.7 million Iranians have a fixed internet and use ADSL or fiber optic or TD-LTE services⁵. According to another report⁶, 87% of mobile users are using Android devices and around 11% are using IOS devices, which means there are approximately 46 million Android and 6 million IOS users in Iran.

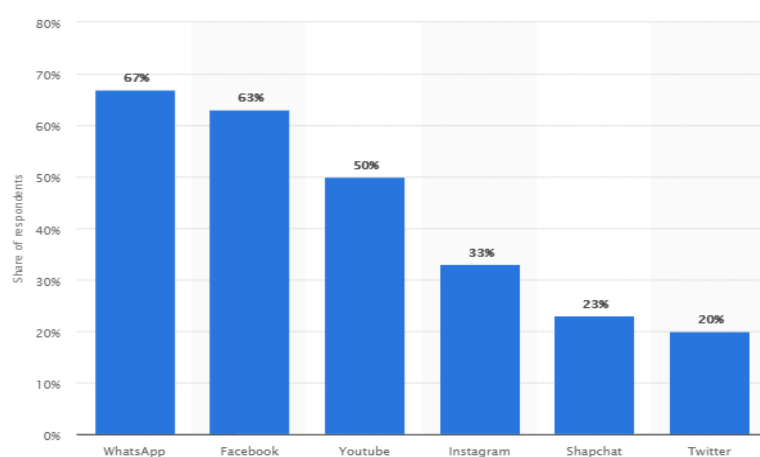
⁴Retrieved from <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/>

⁵ Retrieved from <https://ictamar.ict.gov.ir/>

⁶ Retrieved from <http://gs.statcounter.com/os-market-share/mobile/iran>

According to the Statista, the most popular social media in the middle east are Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram respectively. But this usage pattern cannot be applied for Iran market due to the country special situation. WhatsApp, which is a messenger application, is less popular in comparison with its competitor, Telegram. In addition, other worldwide popular social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are blocked in Iran. With the absence of other alternatives in the market at this moment, Instagram is not only the most downloaded social media but also the most popular one.

Share of respondents using social media in the Middle East and North Africa as of March 2017, by platform



Data visualized by tableau

© Statista 2018

Figure 2 Share of respondents using social media in the Middle East and North Africa as of March 2017, by platform⁷

Telegram was the most popular messenger (around 40 million users) with the most daily traffic⁸. The application has been recently filtered in Iran. According to the statistics, 60% percent of the Internet bandwidth was spent on using this app. At April 2018 this messenger had been blocked by judicial authorities. According to the judicial order, ISPs should block Telegram in a way that it should not be worked by anti-filters like VPNs. Although there are still some ways that people could reach this messenger, Internet bandwidth spent by this app had been decreased based on news. At the same

⁷ <https://cafebazaar.ir/app/com.instagram.android/?l=en>

⁸ <http://techrasa.com/2017/09/06/infographic-telegram-usage-statistics-in-iran/>

time, the installation of Instagram in Cafe Bazaar (the most popular Iranian android market) has been increased from 16 M to 20M.

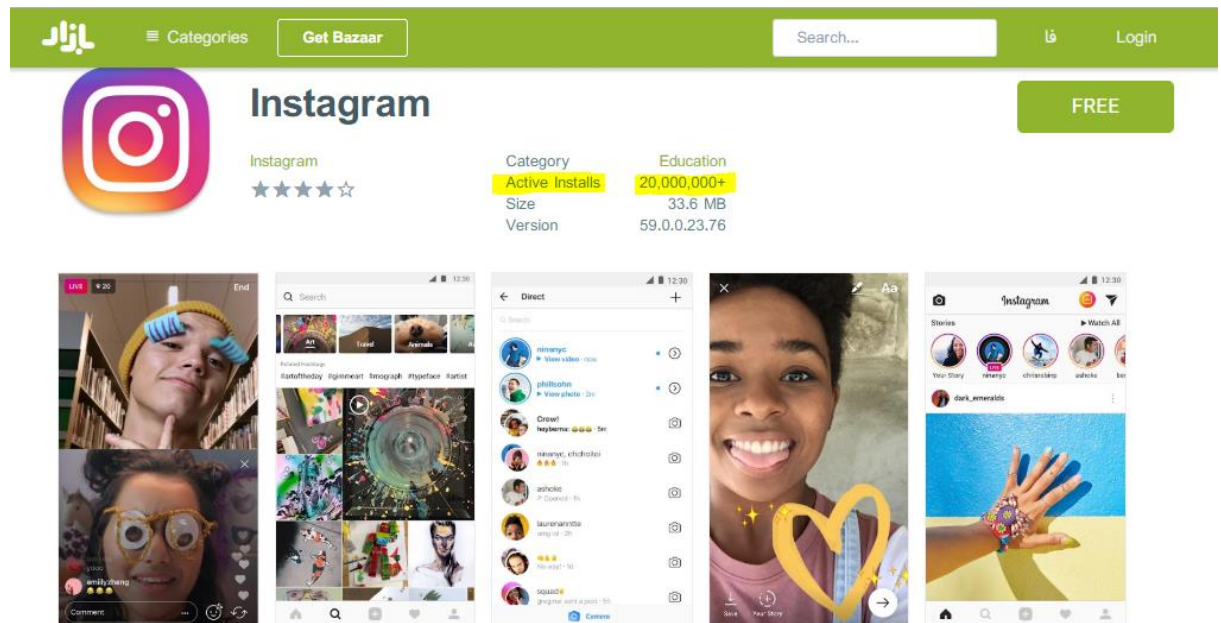


Figure 3 Cafe Bazaar application with the number of active installed Instagram

If we want to estimate the number of active mobile users on Instagram, we can consider Cafe Bazaar which is the most popular Iranian Android market(36 million users). There are 20 millions of active installs only through this android market. In Addition, there might be many downloads by Google Play too. It is estimated that google play has 10 million Iranian users so that we consider at least 4 million Instagram install through this android market too. Considering 6-7 million IOS users in Iran (which we assume they are most likely to have Instagram). So there should be more than 30 million Instagram users in Iran. Considering the fact that 6 million Iranians, mostly the younger generation, are living outside Iran and the number of Persian speakers (e.g. Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and . . .) users of Instagram would raise respectively. Users population is growing every day and it seems they react favorably and fast to the new features like stories and lives.

User behaviors, like their attention span and activity time, are another aspects to study besides the quantity of the of installed Instagram app in Iran. Based on Nazarbazaar.ir⁹ online survey published on July 2017 with the population of 3707

⁹ <https://www.nazarbazaar.ir/infographic/>

responders (2839 men and 878 women, 18 to 65 years old) 80% of Iranian users check their Instagram app on daily basis.

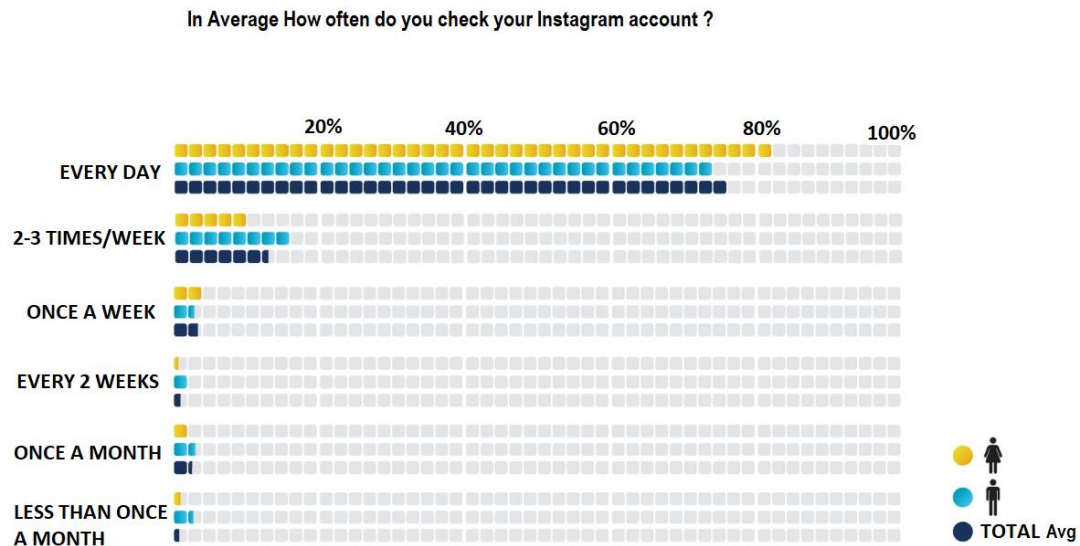


Figure 4 An average usage of Instagram based on Nazar Bazar

On average 50% of responders check their Instagram page more than 5 times per day and each time they spend averagely more than 17 minutes.

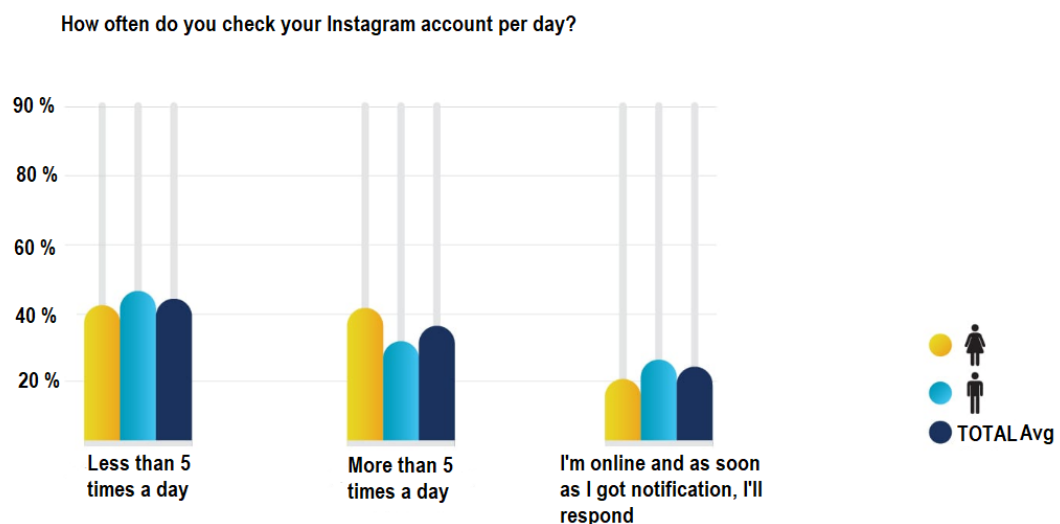


Figure 5 Usage of Instagram per day based on Nazar Bazar online survey

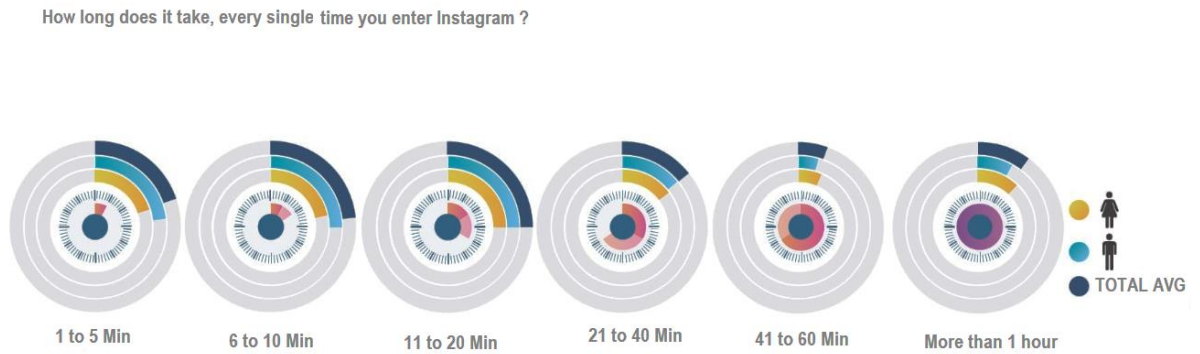


Figure 6 Duration of Instagram usage each time, based on Nazar Bazar online survey

The fact that the three previous charts are one year old should not be neglected. During last year, the access to Telegram was limited and it increased the number of Instagram users and their level of activities and engagement. It is assumed, in the absence of Telegram, the Iranians' Instagram consumption rate is much higher today.

On the other hand, if we consider the lack of popularity of mass media like television in Iran. only 6% of the young generation in urban areas spend more than 2 hours watching TV. (M.Jari et al, 2014). Furthermore, advertising in mass media like television is much more expensive than digital social media and it is less precise to the target audience than Instagram advertising.

All provided facts from Iranian media accessibility and effectiveness are in favor of Instagram as a significant advertisement tool for small businesses. Since the Instagram feature of direct sponsored posts for advertising is not available in Iran, advertising through influencers becomes a main logical option for businesses.

3.2. Social Media Influencers

First, we should answer who social media influencers are. As (Freberg, et al 2011) " says; "Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media."

"These dominant users generate trends and play a significant role to shape or manipulate opinions in social networks. These opinions are crucial in areas such as

marketing or opinion mining. Many companies have started targeting the key individuals called influencers, who are in contextual alignment with their brand and operate for the companies indirectly for finding the potential customers. This is an indirect form of marketing also called influencer marketing". (J. More & C. Lingam, 2017) “.

SIMs make interesting content (in Instagram case, video, pictures or caption) for their followers. Social media users, follow them because of their interest in an area or concept. They find SIMs' pages interesting or admire SIMs in their field of expertise so that they trust received information and advice from SIMs. Additionally, people are more inclined to value the opinions of actual people, same as influencers, instead of direct advertising of a company, because such opinions are perceived to be genuine. They are independent third parties, unlike the companies which are trying to sell them their products. According to (More, 2017) “Social media influencers are the entities in the social network, who help potential customers make a buying decision by influencing his opinion, through social networking. An influencer can be any person who reviews a product, posts a blog about a new product, any industry expert or any person who has a potential to influence people.” In Simple words, the influencers mentioned in this essay, refer to Instagram users who have so many followers (usually more than 3000 followers) and their page posts usually have a repeated theme in a specific area or industry.

3.3. Influencer Marketing

There are many ways in which brands can utilize SIM's page to engage with their target audience, including paid or sponsored posts. Modified posts give an SIM the freedom to provide the content based on the theme of his/her page and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). eWOM refers to the positive or negative contents made about a product, service or brand, which are available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). eWOM encompasses unpaid, organic communication by consumers who have the desire to share brand-related information with others in their social networks due to positive prior experiences with particular brands. However, in order to amplify the brand message and stimulating interactions, businesses might opt to use paid eWOM in the process of influencer marketing.

One of the promises of influencer marketing is the interaction between followers in their pages. People trust influencers and they pay attention not only to the posts they publish, but also they participate in discussions too. As Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) said, “Online communities and Internet forums are social environment that facilitate social interaction of individuals.” Members of online communities participate in different group activities and support other members through their social interactions and communications in the provided platform. They use social technologies, such as social media, online communities, and other Web applications, to support other members by their experience and information sharing. These communities allow people to obtain information for products and services and to support each other (Y. Lu, Zhao, & Wang, 2010). This type of information, which is created by other consumers, is a new kind of word-of-mouth recommendation as used in traditional markets. (Hajli, 2015). This interactive area is a great opportunity for business to increase awareness of potential customers about their brand. Also despite other types of digital marketing, shared content by influencers would stay much longer than others in social media due to discussion and interaction of followers.

As same as the worldwide trends, influence marketing is increasing in Iran too. According to google trends, in the last two years, influencer marketing has become popular and people are interested to know about it or use it more. The following charts

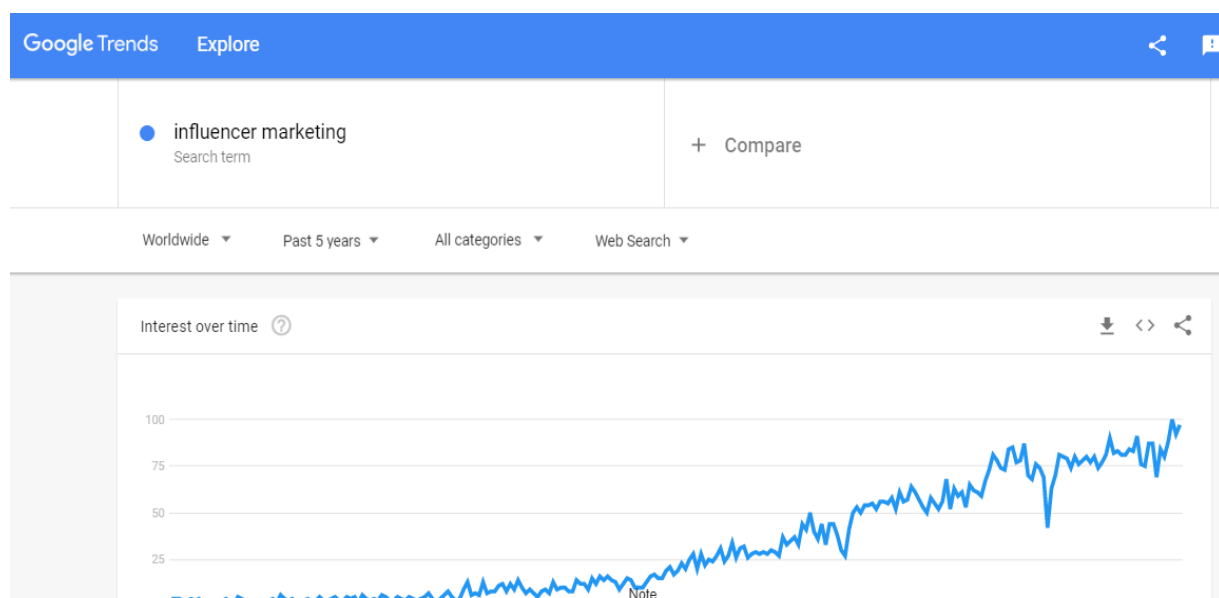


Figure 7 Increase in searching for the term “Influencer marketing” in past 5 years based on Google trend analytic

also support the discussed trend in the Iranian market. As is demonstrated below, Iran is not exceptional from the expansion of this term.¹⁰

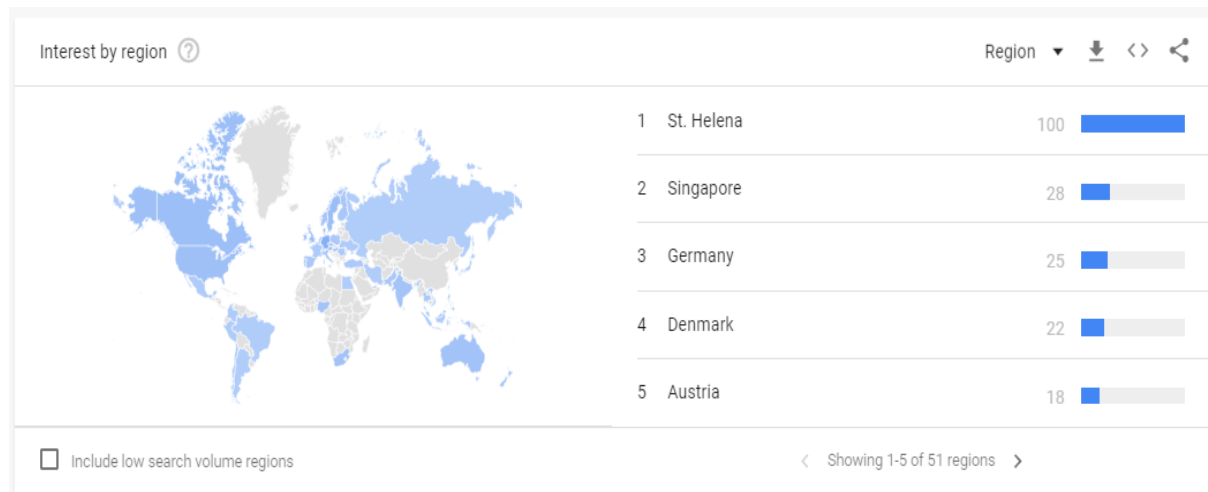


Figure 8 searching the term of “influencer marketing” in past 5 years based on Google trend analytic

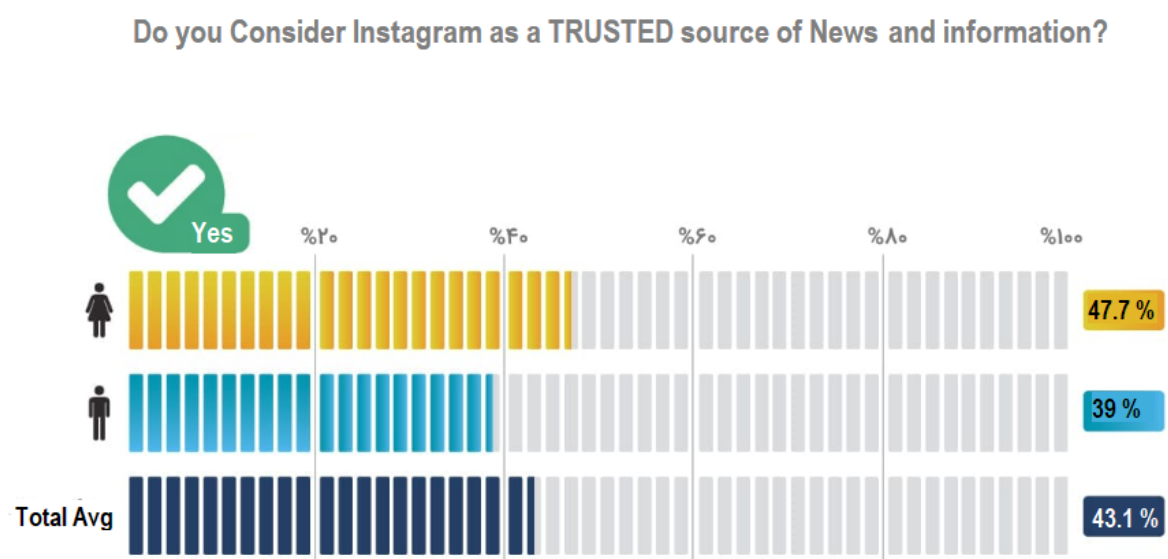


Figure 9 Instagram users behavior (trusting Instagram as a source of information) based on Nazar Bazaar online survey

According to Nazarbazaar.ir¹¹ online survey, around 50% of responders, admitted that they trust Instagram as a source of news or information generally and it

¹⁰ <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&q=influencer%20marketing>

¹¹ <https://www.nazarbazaar.ir/infographic/>

is predicted that this percentage would be much higher if we ask the same question about their trusted SMIs they follow.

Likewise, “In previous researches, use of influencers such as celebrities (e.g. Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Jin and Phua, 2014), brand community members (e.g. Kim, Sungand Kang, 2014), and bloggers (Lee and Watkins, 2016), have been found to significantly increase consumers’ positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Due to its ability to reach a large segment of consumers in a relatively short period of time and its low cost compared to traditional ad campaigns, social media-based influencer marketing has become a highly popular way for brands to engage their consumers online.” (N. Evans et al, 2017)

4. Methodology

For this research, I gathered divers insight in influencer marketing and examine approaches of different agencies, platforms or SMEs. I investigated, whether there is an alignment in approaches or a gap exists in this industry. All interviews last around an hour averagely. According to Block (2008), 8 participants are sufficient for constructing a reliable and valid prototype for a person, concept, or entity (N. Freberg et al, 2011).

In this regards, I considered three digital advertising agencies in Tehran who are consulting businesses in their marketing campaigns: Sisarv, Maat, and Makan group. In these agencies, I had an open interview with the contact persons between the company and the influencers or celebrities.

On the other hand, I studied two Iranian online platforms which provide information about Iranian influencers active in the market, Chanka and Didogram. I interviewed the co-founders of these platforms.

Since the aim of this report is providing information for small and medium-sized companies especially, new startups in Iran market, I also interviewed three startups who recently run influencer marketing campaigns in order to increase the awareness about their service or products. I had an interview with the co-founders of Vono, Pourandokht, and FitnFine. In these interviews, I asked about how to run an influencer marketing campaign, finding and communicating with influencers, their experiences and results.

Considering the diversity of responders based on the target of the report (three agencies, two platforms, and three startups), it is safe to assume, the information is strongly reliable. I extracted the information from each interview as codes and then by categorizing these codes, I offer the following guideline for the small and medium-size companies. This is worthy of mention that after 4th interview, no new code was added which shows the convergence of ideas between interviewees.

In addition, By the help of databases of our interviewees, I gathered information about 365 active Iranian influencers and their followers, in order to provide more detailed information about this market. All data and tables are available per request.

5. Guideline Steps

5.1. Objectives of the Campaign and Target Audience

Before any engagement begins with social media such as Instagram, practitioners must develop a strategy and align it with communications objectives. The objective might be to stimulate an engaging conversation which allows us to change perception, diagnose expectations and bring clarity to the dialogue.

The essence of developing a brand strategy is to build an authentic relationship between the brand and the target audience. Defining your brand strategy, allows you to utilize the marketing, advertising, public relations, and social media to consistently and accurately reinforce your character. Without defining the core strategy, all channels of communication can often become a hit or miss expense (Tsai, n.d.). After the steps of the decision-making process, practitioners must then define communications objectives to begin mapping out influencers to engage in a digital conversation.

When determining the main objectives of the campaign, the focus should be on the target audience. Since the ultimate goal is to convert the visitors into the paying customers, it's only logical to build a marketing strategy around them. This means all of the efforts should be focused on getting to know the target audience first, and anticipate how they might engage in the conversation. Their age, gender, location, and interests are affecting the procedure of influencer marketing campaign. Also, the location of the brand in the purchasing procedure stage should be considered. Figure

10 shows the different stages of the purchasing procedure. Each stage requires to transfer a tailored main message to the customer.

If you are a small startup (which is the main focus of this research) and your product or service is new in the market, you should increase awareness about your existence. Increasing awareness is usually the main and very basic objective of all influencer marketing campaigns. But if you're in consideration and loyalty stage, you might be already a known brand. In this stage, you need endorsers to compare your brand to others and provide more information for your target audience, in order to convince your costumers to purchase your products or services. If you are in the last stages, the goal is to stimulate purchasing by loyal customers. Obviously, the stage of your brand and your target audience is the foundation of choosing the appropriate marketing campaign strategy. Especially, by considering all the mentioned factors, you might have a better insight in order to choose the best-fit influencer who are the true match with the objectives of the campaign.

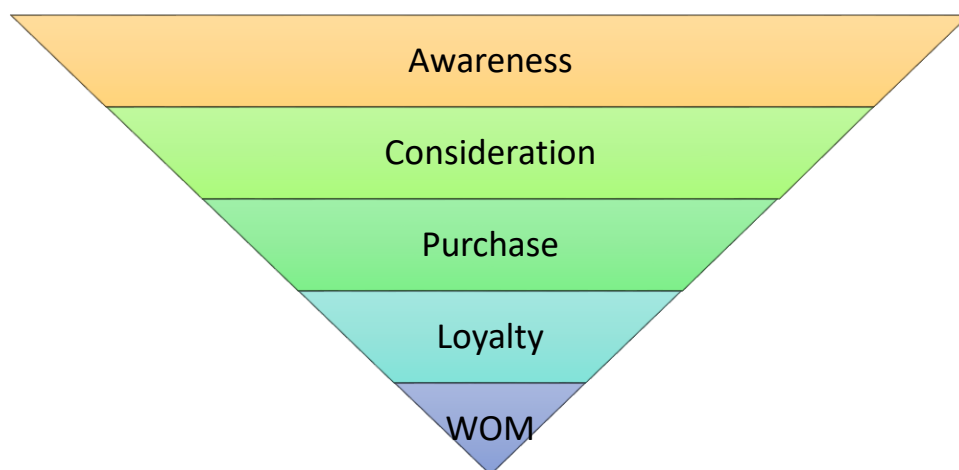


Figure 10 Different stages of the purchasing procedure (F. Kotsi & N. Slak Valek, 2018)

5.2. Selecting the Best Fit Influencers

Selecting the best-fit influencer is not as easy as it might seem in theory! In reality, you will have to work hard in order to line up your brand with the content that influencers are providing for their audience. This procedure is one of the most important steps of influencer marketing campaign. According to our interview with Ali Fozooni, Co-founder of Chanka Platform about Iran market, two years ago, there were few influencers in the market for each category. There was surplus demand for influencers

in the market, consequently, influencers were overpriced and working with them and building a network among them was not easy. But nowadays, this market has become more balanced due to increasing the number of influencers.

It is recommended that companies build a relationship with their hired influencer instead of just dealing with an agreement. As Carter Hostelley, CEO and Founder of Leadtail, said: “Building relationships with influencers can be a very effective way to reach your target audience in a more credible manner than simply buying advertising. With that said, “influencer marketing” is not an overnight process. It starts with knowing who the most relevant influencers are in your industry segment. Although finding an influencer who already knows our brand is a smart choice, for newly born startups, it is not an option. In this case, it is recommended to educate your selected influencer about your brand first. It is also recommended to give freedom to the influencer about publishing post for your campaign. As the influencer knows better about interests and reactions of his/her follower. In addition, it perceived more naturally than other types of advertising posts. This matter intensifies the importance of educating the influencers about your brand, its features and values.

Another important consideration of choosing an influencer is to consider their previous or future sponsors, if they have been already working with your competitors, it might damage your brand image. Therefore, it should be mentioned in your contract in order to avoid conflicts. In the following chapter more details of finding best-fit influencers will be discussed.

5.2.1. Influencers Categories

5.2.1.1. Quantitative Category

Influencers can be categorized by different quantitative and qualitative aspects. These categories might help businesses to select them based on targets of their campaign and reaching precisely to target audience and also might help CEO to have insight about budgeting of campaign. one of the main categories is separating influencers by their numbers of follower:

- **None influencers** have less than 3K followers
- **Micro influencers** are the ones who have 3K to 25K followers.
- **Intermediate level influencers** have from 25K to 100K follower

- **Macro influencers** have more than 100K followers.
- **Celebrities** are influencers who are famous by their name or face among people due to their occupation. Actors/actress, artists or athletes are in this category.

All interviewees admitted that micro influencers have a higher level of engagement. Correspondingly, due to the lower number of followers in comparison with macro influencers, they offer cheaper prices, consequently, ROI of using them, is usually higher.

Although the number of followers is an important indicator especially for pricing and budgeting, it is not the only factor to consider due to the possibility of having fake followers. to get more benefits, users often artificially increase the popularity and engagement on their content in several ways. Some of the prevalent ways are to leverage bots, purchase social metrics such as likes, followers, and shares from black market services, and become part of collusion networks which can be used to trade inorganic engagement. Such artificial bolstering of popularity can cause brands to lose money, advertisers to not reach the relevant audience, and recommender algorithms to give poor suggestions. (I. Sen et al, 2018) Other quantitative factors should be considered which we will talk about them in the evaluation chapter. Given the recognition that online influence is about quality, not quantity, these methods should be viewed as a starting place only (Freberg, 2011).

5.2.1.2. Qualitative Category

Based on the Industry: Besides the quantitative indicators, one of the most important categories for selecting an influencer is the content of their page. Each influencer is recognized by the area of knowledge, specialty, proficiency, skills or abilities in a certain industry. According to our interviews and database of our interviewees, influencers can be categorized by the following groups. Although there might be some overlaps in the areas, this is the most common pattern we could offer based on the market norms. depending on a product or service, businesses can use a combination of following influencers for their campaigns.

FASHION AND BEAUTY	PHOTOGRAPHY	ART	LIFE STYLE	CAR
Beauty	Press	Visual artist	Inspiration	Car reviewer
Fashion designer	News and politics	Painting	Magazine	Car photographer
Jewelry	Nature	Designer	Cancer	
Model	Film	Home decorator	Ideas	PARENTS AND CHILD
Luxury	Wildlife	video creator	Yoga	New born equipment
Accessories	Reporters	Cartoonist	SHOPPING	Children life
Shoes	Documentaries	Producer	Cats	
Cosmetic		Director	Health	WRITER
FOOD AND RESTAURANT	SPORT	Travel and Hospitality	PSYCOLOGY	Blogger
Vegan	Racing	Travel writer	Sexology	Journalism
Cooking	Basketball	Travel Equipment	Child psychologist	Travel writer
Foodie	Body building	Travel photographer	Mental health	
Chef	Football	Adventurist		Fun and entertainment
Recipes	Motorcycle			Comedian
Cakes				Standup comedian
Restaurants				Gamer

Table 1Influencer Categories based on the interviews in Iran market

These categories would help in finding key leader opinion (KOL) especially in technical areas, a journalist in the information technology area, an athlete, a dentist or a dermatologist could be best examples of KOL influencers. They have the most influence on their followers due to their specialty and their posts or opinions are more likely to be trusted by their followers. One of the best usages of KOLs in influencer marketing campaign would be for technical products such as a car, cellphone or health-related products. By considering key selling points of product (KSP) we can find the best KOL for specific products and services. Ongoing chain-reaction which is called “Word-of-mouth” is invaluable by itself, but the support of opinion leaders, who are industrial rather than public celebrities, can also be taken on board more formally, such as in advertising or through appearances at company seminars. Some technological companies (Compaq and NEC Technologies) have managed to secure the endorsement of a number of well-known technical journalists for their FPD screen. Also, Pharmaceutical companies try to attract the views of prominent doctors on their new drugs to influence the views (Easingwood, 2000) there is another local example of successful influencer marketing campaign in Iran which is related to Huawei Company, their objective was to emphasis on features of their new mobile phone, in this regard they run a campaign, by using specific influencer based on each KSR as following.



Figure 11 Huawei influencer marketing campaign using divers KOL based on KSP

Based on personal Character of the influencer: Another important category would be the personal character of the influencer or a celebrity. This factor is important since it is highly related to brand positioning. On the other hand, a better understanding of the perceived personality of social media influencers provides tools for optimizing an organization's SMI capital (Freberg, 2011). Matching the target segment and brand values with the characters of the influencer need to be carefully selected. The typical consumer may symbolically aspire to identify as a celebrity by purchasing the product recommended by the celebrity. If a celebrity is recognized, recall of information endorsed by this influencer is superior to when an individual fails to recognize the celebrity (F. Kotsi & N. Slak Valek, 2018), it means, followers would perceive the personal character of influencer same as the characters of the brand. In this regard, finding the best fit would be vital for brand positioning. According to our interviews, most common personal characters which had been used for brand positioning are as following.

- environmentalist
- humanitarian
- athletes
- positive
- luxury
- mom and child
- family person

If the target of the campaign is to position brand values or corporate social responsibility (CSR), it is better to use this category as well.

Based on followers and demographic characters: There is another factor in order to categorize influencers which is demographic characters of their followers. What is the age range, gender or location of each influencer? This indicator would help us to optimize ROI of the campaign by knowing followers age range, gender or location. Finding information about the demographic characters of the followers would be possible through some platforms and tools or simply asking the influencer to send this information

since one of the advantages of having “business Page” in Instagram, is to have demographic information of followers

5.2.1.2.1. Study of Iranian influencers pages

As a result of the interviews, I considered some hypotheses to test the quantitative data. For example, some agencies admitted that “Campaigns with the fun theme are more successful”, “micro influencers have more influence on target audience than macro ones”, “one of the important factors in choosing an influence is the gender”. To examine these claims, I did the quantitative analysis for the following three main questions:

- 1) What are the most popular categories for Iranian Instagram users?
- 2) Is there any relation between gender of influencer and number of followers in each category?
- 3) Is there any relation between the engagement rate and the number of followers?

I gathered information about the Instagram page of 365 active influencers in the Iran market who have around 10 thousand to 2.4 million followers and have already worked with our selected agencies. Although we could not find all the influencers in the Iran market, I have at least 8 influencers for each category based on Table 1. I labeled the influencers considering the content of their pages and their areas of specialty. Although there were some influencers which could be fit in more than one category (Mostly for lifestyle pages), I decided to use only a unique label in order to avoid conflicts. For example, an influencer who could be fit in both photography and lifestyle categories, got a label of Photography or an influencer who were a producer and his content could fit in both lifestyle and art, I considered him as an art category, to balance the number of influencers in each category. Since I could not find the information about the influencers active in the field of travel, I labeled travel writers influencers in “Writer” category too. As a result, we have 32 subcategories which could be fit into 11 main categories (All labeling were based on table 1).

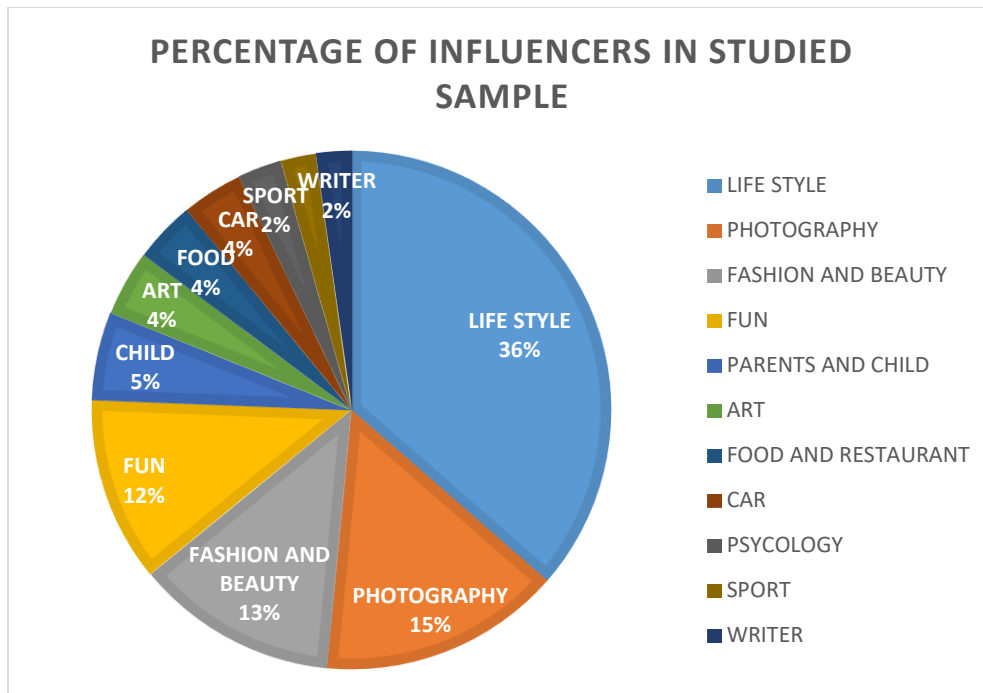


Figure 12 shows the percentage and population of each category, in our studied sample. Since lifestyle label, indicates a general concept, it could be predicted with the highest percentage.

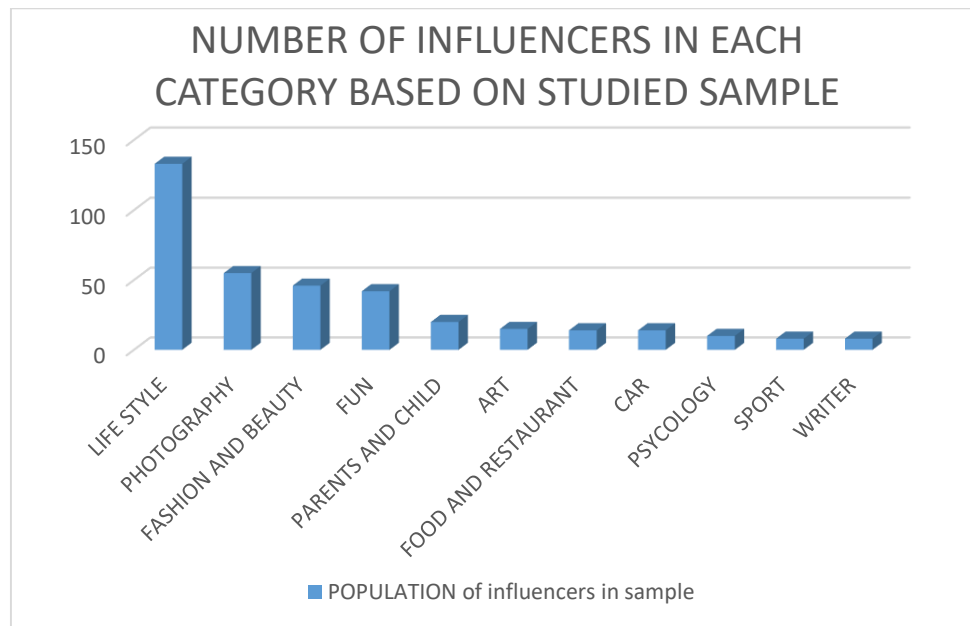


Figure 3. Number of influencers in each Category based on the studied sample

In order to answer the questions and examine the hypothesis, I also extracted the numbers of followers, average likes and views on the latest 5 posts of each page. Also, the gender of the influencer was extracted from their Instagram page.

For the first question, about the most popular category for Iranian users, according to my sample, 7 influencers have more than 1 million followers. As it can be seen in table number 2, four of them are in the Fun category and 2 of them are in Fashion. Which shows the market interests towards Fun content.

influencer	Category	Followers
influencer #1	FUN	2.4 million
influencer #2	FUN	1.6 million
influencer #3	SPORT	1.5 million
influencer #4	FASHION AND BEAUTY	1.4 million
influencer #5	FUN	1.4 million
influencer #6	FASHION AND BEAUTY	1.3 million
influencer #7	FUN	1.3 million

Table 2 INFLUENCERS WITH MORE THAN 1MILLION FOLLOWERS

Above table is not enough to have a conclusion about interests of the market, considering the fact that, the sample size for all categories were not the same, for example, I had 133 influencers in “LIFESTYLE” category, while there were only 8 influencers in “WRITER” and “SPORT” categories. In this regard, I calculated the Mean for followers in each category, Mean of like and view for each category were also calculated.

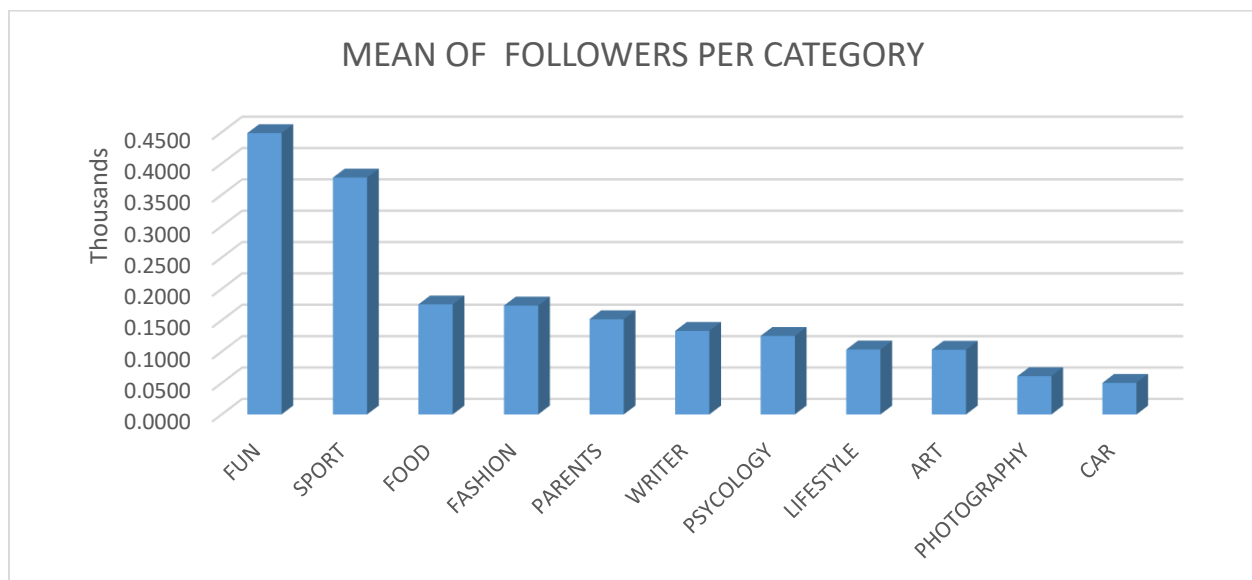


Figure 14 MEAN OF FOLLOWERS PER CATEGORY

Figure number 14 confirms the first hypothesis about FUN content. It seems FUN and SPORTS categories have more average followers and FOOD, FASHION AND BEAUTY and PARENTS AND CHILD are the next most popular ones. On the other hand, CAR and PHOTOGRAPHY are the categories with less average followers. So it can be suggested that, in order to have a successful influencer marketing campaign, having fun content or relating the campaign with SPORTS activities or FOOD, would be a good strategy, in order to reach more audience.

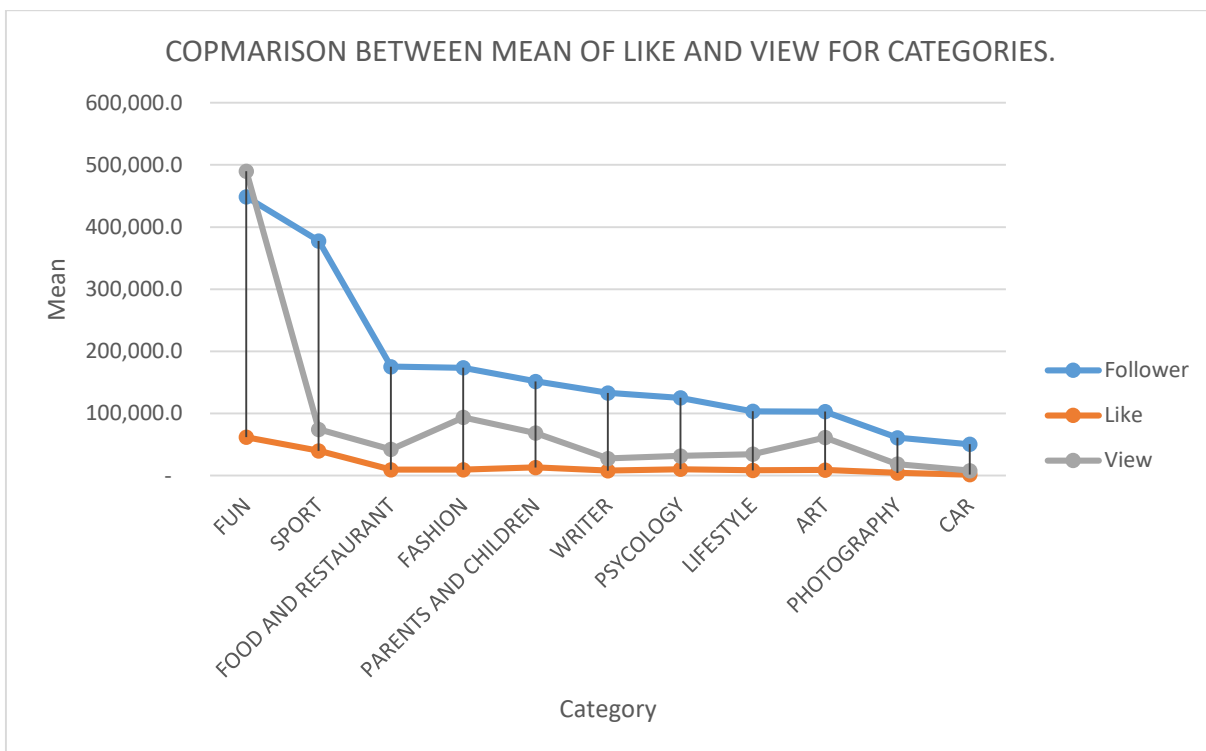


Figure 15. Comparison between Mean of like and view for categories

Not only the number of followers but also the number of likes and reviews, confirms that the Iranian market has so much interest in the FUN category. Above charts shows the trend in average likes, has the same pattern as average followers. The average number of viewers in the FUN category is higher than number of followers, due to the high rate of missed data in view column. It is worthy of mention that based on calculation, influencers in FUN, SPORT and FASHION categories have a large range of followers, likes and views due to a high standard deviation. As a result, to run an influencer marketing campaign in these categories, finding an influencer with a higher number of followers, is important.

to study the gender of influencers in my sample and possible effects on follower behavior, I analyzed gender distribution of my sample. 66% of influencers in my sample were female and only 33% were male. Nevertheless, in some categories, there is no female or very few in comparison with male. For example, based on figure 16, there are no Women in the CAR category and only 1 in the SPORT. Females are also fewer in FUN and PHOTOGRAPHY categories. On the other hand, there is no Male in PARENTS AND CHILD category that we can call it mom and child and only one male in FASHION AND BEAUTY. Also there are fewer male in LIFESTYLE category.

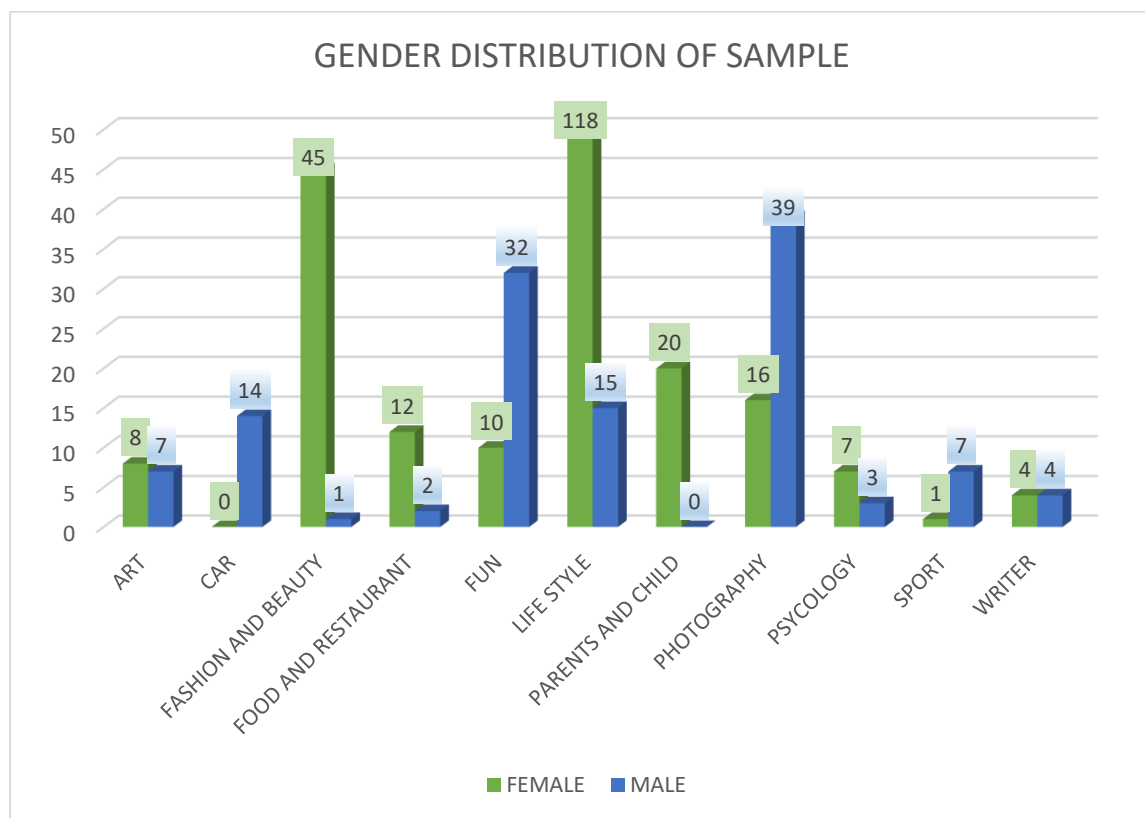


Figure 16 gender distribution of sample

Without considering the category, it seems female influencers has fewer followers than male also they receive fewer likes than male. According to table3, although female influencers are twice more than male in the sample, they have fewer followers and they receive fewer likes. In figure 17, You can see the average number of followers, likes and views on female and male.

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Female followers	241	11.00	1400.00	29751.20	123.4490	150.73418
Male followers	122	9.00	2400.00	26798.50	219.6598	365.45824
Female like	229	500.00	100000.00	2143800.00	9361.5721	12424.88339
Male like	111	400.00	400000.00	2618600.00	23590.9910	54663.19611

Table 3 Descriptive statistic based on gender and number of Followers and likes

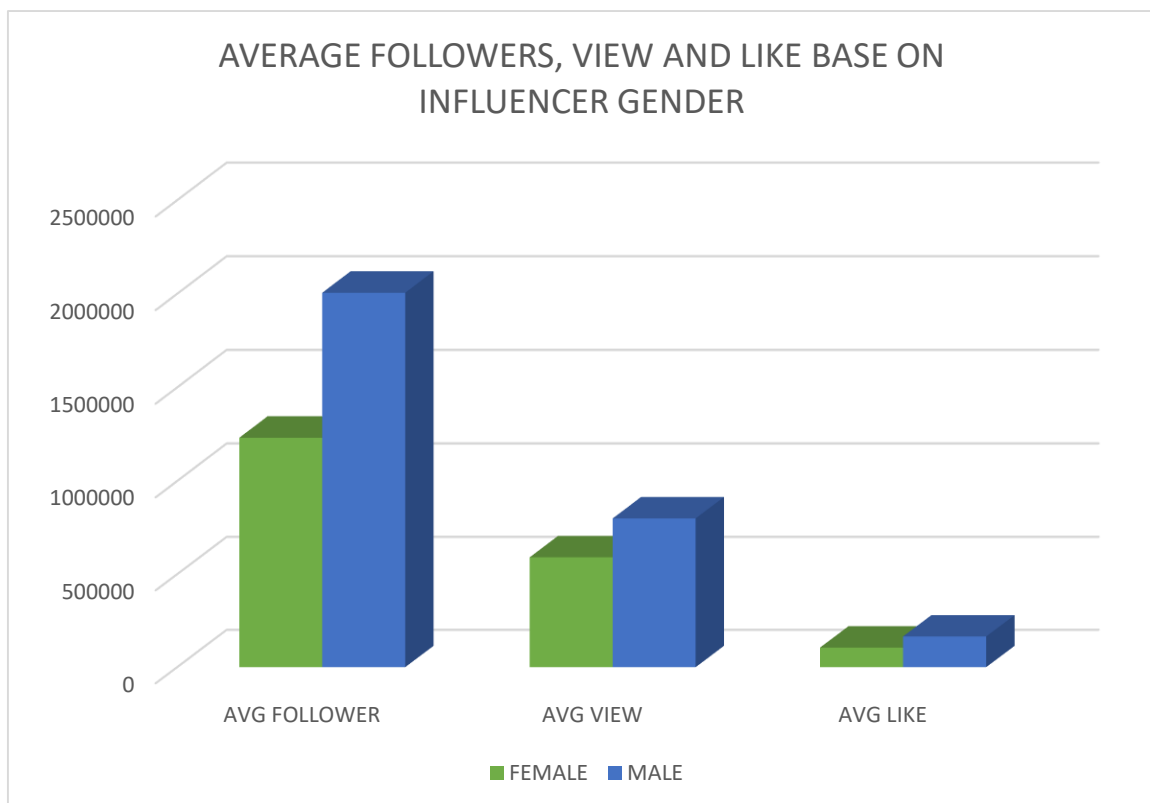


Figure 17 AVERAGE FOLLOWERS, VIEW AND LIKE BASE ON THE GENDER OF INFLUENCER

So it seems, companies should consider male influencers more for their influencer marketing campaign. But let's take a more detailed look at a number of followers, like and view based on categories.

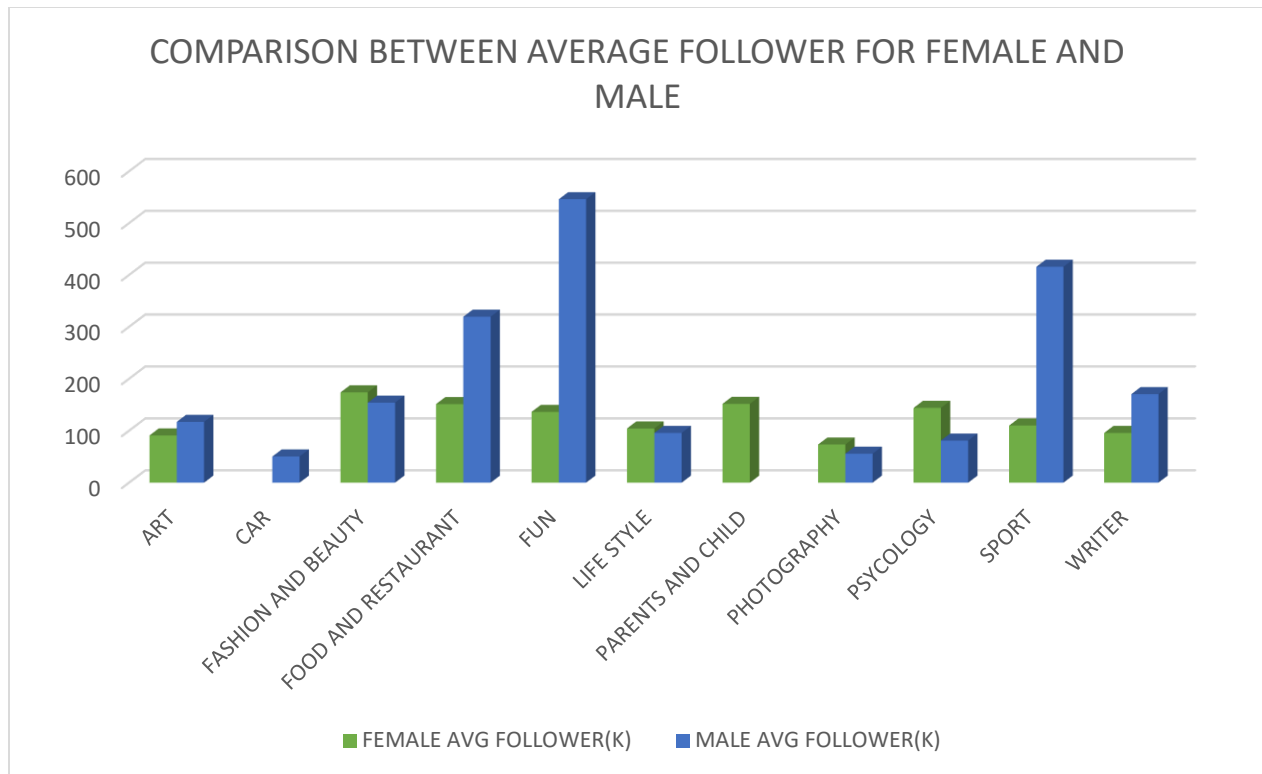


Figure 18 COMPARISON BETWEEN AVERAGE FOLLOWER FOR FEMALE AND MALE

According to the above figure, in Categories such as FASHION AND BEAUTY, LIFESTYLE, PHOTOGRAPHY and PSYCHOLOGY female influencers have more followers averagely. Considering the fact that there is only one male influencer in FASHION category and FEMALE rate are much higher in the LIFESTYLE category, We can conclude that in PHOTOGRAPHY and PSYCHOLOGY, female influencers, have more followers averagely. In contrast, male influencers have more followers in ART, FUN, FOOD, SPORT and WRITER categories. Having a higher number of followers is not the only indicator to measure the influence of an influencer. So I calculated Average like and view as well.

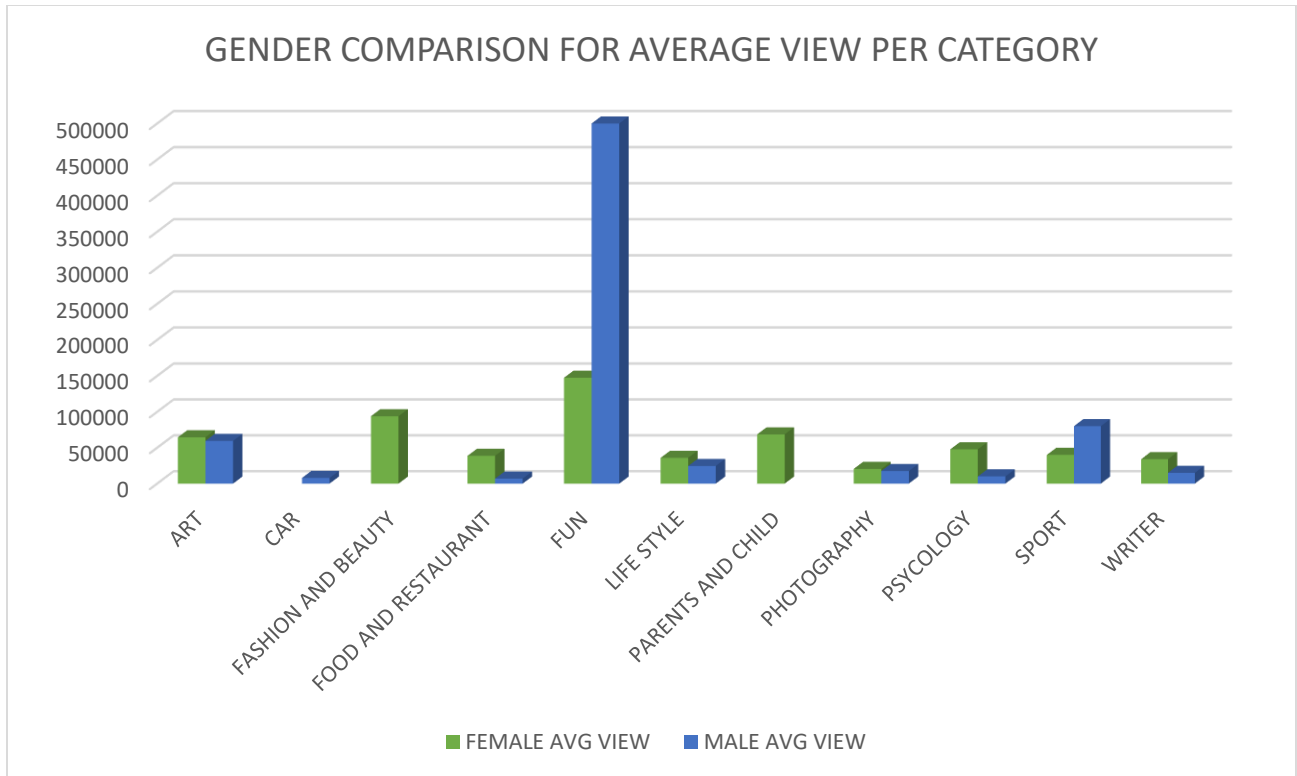


Figure 19 GENDER COMPARISON FOR AVERAGE VIEW PER CATEGORY

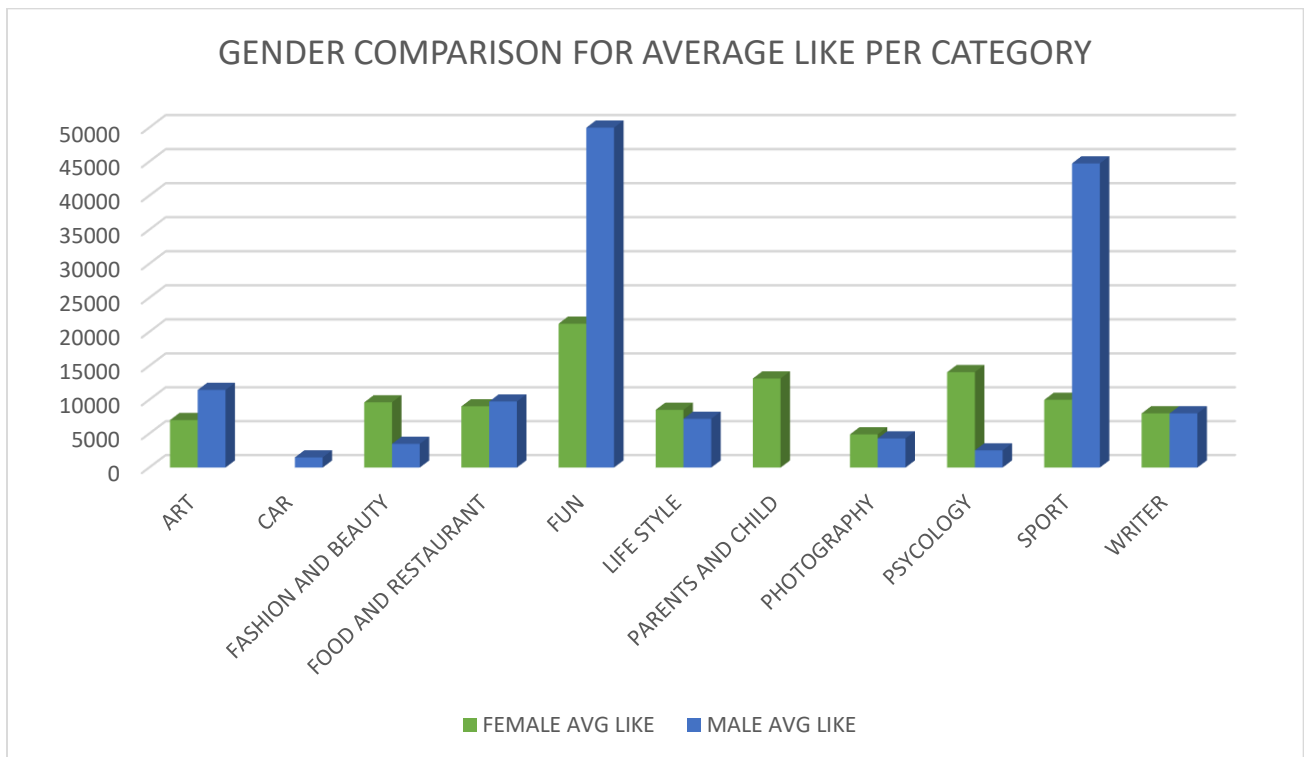


Figure 20 GENDER COMPARISON FOR AVERAGE LIKE PER CATEGORY

Above figures show that female influencers in PHOTOGRAPHY and PSYCHOLOGY not only have more followers but also receive more like and attention too. On the other hand, in ART, FUN and SPORT categories men receive more like and attention as it was predicted.

It is worthy to mention that, in the WRITER category, although female influencers have a fewer average follower, they receive more view and same likes as Male influencers. (with the same sample size).

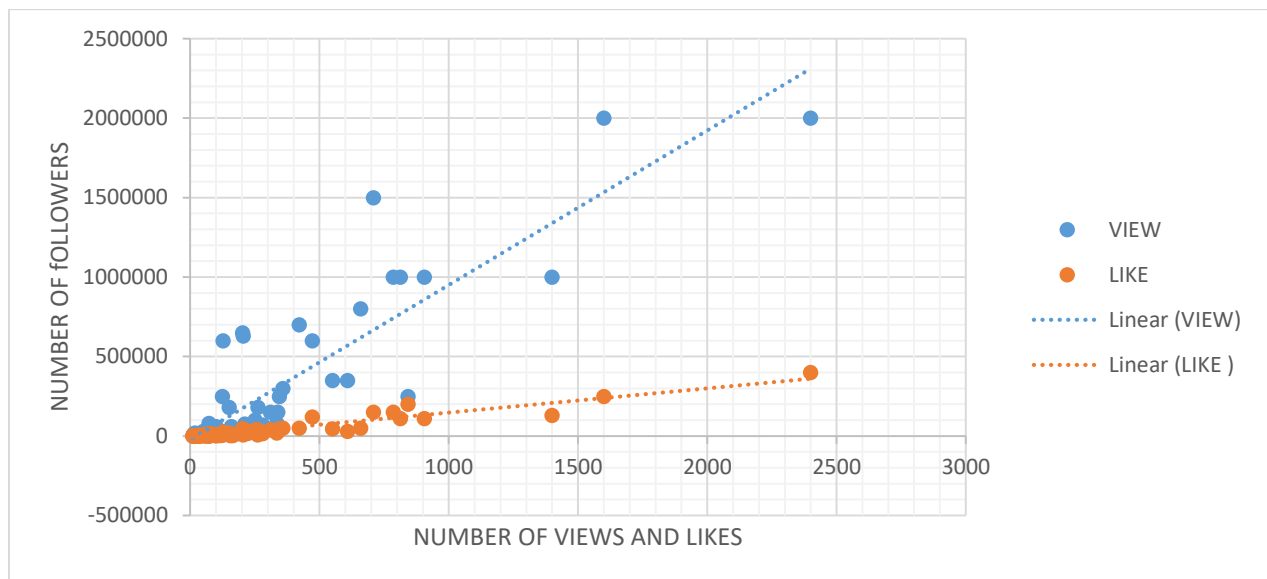


Figure 21 T linear relation between Followers and Like or View

According to the above figure, the number of followers has a linear relation with the number of views and likes. It means, pages with more followers receive more views and like which is logical and it shows data reliability. As it can be seen in this figure like rates are much lower than views which is also normal on Instagram.

In order to answer the third question, to estimate the influence rate of Micro (less than 25000 followers) and Macro (more than 100,000 followers), influencers, I realized the number of views and like would not be enough to have a conclusion. For a better evaluation due to the linear relation with a number of followers, another measurement is needed. In this regard, I calculated the average of **comments** for each influencer separately. Since writing a comment, requires an extra effort from followers than clicking

on the like button, both **Weighted Engagement rate**¹² and normal engagement rate for each page are also calculated. The following figure shows both the average engagement rate for micro and macro influencers.

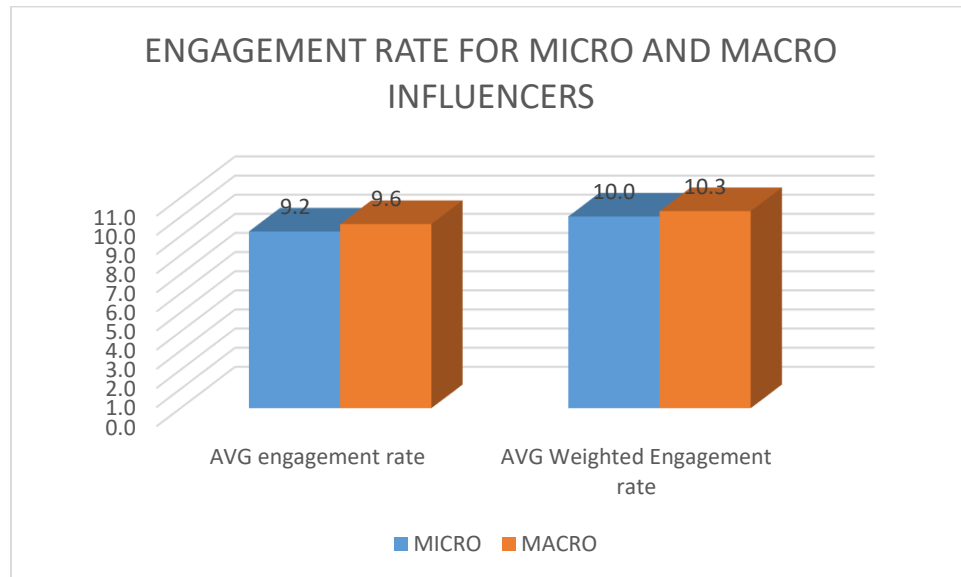


Figure 22 COMPARISON BETWEEN AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT RATE FOR MICRO AND MACRO INFLUENCERS

Based on Figure 22, the engagement rate for Micro and Macro influencers doesn't show a significant difference for both weighted and normal engagement rate calculation. So we cannot conclude that Micro influencers have a higher influence on their followers. It seems the engagement rate is not a good indicator to estimate "influence" too. But, Macro influencers receive more noise and spam in their comments due to the high number of followers (Y. Wang et al, 2015) in addition, their sponsored posts are more expensive than Micro influencers. So, if the target of campaign is to attract niche market, Micro influencers might have higher ROI.

¹² See chapter "Evaluation of campaign"

5.3. Evaluation of campaigns

One of the most important steps in influencer marketing campaign is an evaluation. By correctly defining KPIs, the success of the campaign can be determined and it helps companies to decide about continuing to work with influencer even as a brand ambassador or just finish Cooperation. The most common indicators are as following

Impression: number of times each post had been seen

Reach: number of times each post has been seen from the individual account

Engagement: the total number of likes and comments on each post

Not only for evaluating campaign but also to have an overall view of an influencer, these quantitative factors should be calculated for at least, last 5 posts averagely. some common indicators formula which could be useful as follows:

$$\text{Engagement rate of the post} = \frac{\text{numbers of likes} + \text{numbers of comments}}{\text{numbers of followers}} * 100$$

Engagement rate of page =

$$\frac{\text{average of likes for last 5 or 10 posts} + \text{average of comments for last 5 or 10 posts}}{\text{numbers of followers}} * 100$$

Depending on the target of campaign sometimes comments are more valuable than likes, for example when the target of the campaign is to viral a Hashtag by the help of followers or to increase an interaction between target audience by sharing their posts or experience, you need to choose an influencer with the higher rate in comments. Because it shows that followers of this specific influencer, respond favorably to “call to action” arise from this influencer. in this regard, we can use a weighted average.

Weighted Engagement rate of page

$$= \frac{(\text{average of likes for last 5 posts}) + (\text{average of comments for last 5 posts} * 3)}{\text{numbers of followers}} * 100$$

One of the other commonly used evaluation is to follow the hashtag activities. How many times it has been shared or other related hashtags used with the selected one. When a company creates a unique Hashtag for each campaign or, it might help to determine the success of the campaign by tracking numbers of impressions and reach for the Hashtag itself. Especially, when companies use multi influencer for one campaign, it might be better to have specific Hashtag for each influencer. On the other hand, By Hashtag tracking you can find out about relevant hashtag had been used with your campaign in order to understand users opinion about your campaign, the specific reaction of the audience and determine the perceived image of your brand as a result of your campaign.

There are some platforms and websites which are useful for evaluating campaign and also to choose best-fit influencer:

keyhole.co¹³ is one of most powerful platforms to Track hashtag in all social media. It can be used to find information about a specific influencer if he/she gives access to you. Following diagrams and infographics show detailed information can be extracted from this platform. It's a useful application for discovering individuals who are leading the conversations on industry-related events and topics. This information can be also implemented to determine which profiles will likely have the most influence in your industry.

¹³ <https://keyhole.co/mytracks#hashtag>



Figure 22 an example of infographic information , extracted from KeyHole Hashtag tracker platform

There are some other tools and website with database of Iranian influencers which give you a report whether for an Instagram account or Hashtag as the following list:

- <https://minter.io/>
- <https://klear.com/>
- <https://www.tapinfluence.com/influencers/>
- <https://upfluence.com/>
- <https://influencermarketinghub.com/instagram-money-calculator/>
- <https://hypeauditor.com>
- <https://deep.social/>

6. Conclusion

One of the main criticism about university projects is that researchers do not focus on real market needs. In this research, I tried to find a real gap in the market and by interviewing with professionals in Iran market, suggest solutions. Nowadays, with the advent of internet-based businesses, internationalization of brands, are not only limited to big companies. So, this article aims to help all small companies and startups around the world, to have a clear image of influencer marketing industry in Iran.

Following offered guideline, to run an influencer marketing campaign in Iran market, would highly recommended for small and medium-sized companies who want to enter Iran market in order to have a better image of the market and reduce costs arising from wrong decisions. Suggested steps are including alignment of brand strategy and target market, finding the best-fit influencer, finding the most attractive content and the main theme of campaign based on service and product. And finally, implement and evaluate of the campaign.

This article also shed a light to interests and behavior of Iranian Instagram users. There were so many challenges in gathering information about statistic information of influencers pages. The nature of this industry is so dynamic and unstable since it has dealing with human behavior. For example, to estimate the number of comment or likes for pages, I had to make sure that a high number of likes or comments, doesn't have an external reason such as critical social issues or special event in influencer life or sponsored posts. In this regard, I had to check at least 10 last posts to find a trend of each page. In addition, there were some limitations to find the precise statistic of influencers since it has commercial value for agencies and platforms, for example, demographic information of followers or numbers of clicks on Story links was a useful information which was not possible to obtain since it is personal information of Instagram users. However, according to available information, I found that, If the target of the campaign is receiving most view and like, choosing the FUN or SPORTS theme and male influencer, would have the highest ROI. Also for products or services related to PSYCHOLOGY or PHOTOGRAPHY, selecting a female influencer would be a wise choice.

Suggested categories were based on trends in Iran market and it would help the future researcher to study this market too. Especially, finding the best indicators to measure “influence” would be an interesting subject for further researches.

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- <https://cafebazaar.ir/app/com.instagram.android/?l=en>
- <http://techrasa.com/2017/09/06/infographic-telegram-usage-statistics-in-iran/>
- <https://www.nazarbazaar.ir/infographic/>
- <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205y&q=influencer%20marketing>
- <https://keyhole.co/mytracks#hashtag>